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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SANTO DOMINGO 003667

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/CAR MCISAAC AND G/TIP LINDERMAN

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SUBJECT: USG REPORT ON TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS HITS
DOMINICAN NEWS

REF: A. STATE 126171

1B. SANTO DOMINGO 3626

11. (U) Embassy Santo Domingo delivered the Dominican Republic section of the 2003 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report to the Foreign Ministry on June 14; the Embassy press release on the subject made all the dailies the next day. The story grew as on June 16, in response to a written question, the Embassy confirmed USG revocation of the B1/B2 visa of former Director of Migration, Miguel Vasquez in December 2002, under section 212(a)(6)(E) (alien smuggling) of the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act. The visa revocation story led the news on the 17th and continued to have extensive media coverage on Friday, June 18. Less public, but just as important, were informal discussions on consular and TIP issues between emboffs and representatives of the Fernandez government to be inaugurated on August 16. End Summary.

TIP report delivered - official response limited to date

12. (U) Trafficking in Persons (TIP) was on the front pages and in private discussions last week in the Dominican Republic. On June 14, poloffs delivered the 2003 Trafficking in Persons report and reftel talking points to Ambassador Rogert Espailat, Deputy Director of the Americas Desk at the GODR Foreign Ministry. Espailat noted the importance of the report and thanked us for our efforts to work with the Dominican Republic to improve its record on TIP issues. Poloffs stressed the need for continued efforts to enforce the 2003 anti-TIP law and urged the need for arrests and prosecutions. Ambassador Espailat agreed that the GODR has taken the first steps to combat TIP, but needs vigorous future efforts.

13. (U) Poloffs explained that the "watch list" designation means that the GODR will be subject to an interim status report on its anti-TIP efforts. Ambassador Espailat acknowledged the designation and stated that he would pass all the information to Foreign Minister Guerrero Prats.

Editorial reaction mixed, but no defense to content of TIP report

14. (U) The Embassy issued a press release on the 2003 TIP report on the afternoon of June 14th. The press release and the 2003 TIP report were featured in the Santo Domingo dailies over the next two days. Editorial reaction was mixed. Respected newspaper "El Caribe" stated, "The picture presented by the U.S. Department of State on trafficking in persons in the Dominican Republic is gut wrenching . . . the sad part behind this situation is the impunity that permanently seems to protect the organizers of this trade. . . the government must vigorously assume responsibility to put a stop to these crimes, pursuing and arresting traffickers."

15. (U) "Hoy" editors acknowledged a problem in the Dominican Republic: "U.S. preaching on (TIP) may be offensive to many Dominicans, but we've been lax and need to tighten up." Left-of-center, independent "El Nacional" took offense to the U.S. role in producing the report, but did not deny the accuracy of its content. "El Nacional" asserted, "No institution or world forum has given the United States the right or authority to condemn or take over other nations . . . (the report) would be valid if it came from an organization such as the United Nations (or other multilaterals)."

Visa revocation shows USG serious on alien smugglers/anti-TIP efforts

16. (U) On June 16, the Embassy's press section responded to a written request from "El Caribe" newspaper regarding the revocation of the B1/B2 visa of Miguel Vasquez (until March 2004 Director of Migration, currently Minister without Portfolio and Special Assistant to President Mejia). The

next day, all dailies reported that the former Migration Director's B1/B2 visa had been revoked in December 2002, under section 212(a)(6)(E) (alien smuggling) of the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act.

17. (U) The front page headlines on the visa revocation came on June 17, the day of day-long consultations between Fernandez transition team members of the Dominican Liberation Party (PLD) and the US Embassy (reftel B). During a kickoff breakfast for the event, the Ambassador used the headlines as his opening to discuss the importance of anti-corruption efforts and to indicate seriousness of the USG in pursuing alien smugglers and traffickers.

Transition leaders learn about TIP issues

18. (U) Ref A points were made by the Ambassador and other emboffs throughout the day, and specifically and in detail during the session on anti-corruption and the session dedicated to consular and TIP issues. During the consular/TIP session, poloff presented PLD transition team members with copies of the 2003 TIP report (Dominican Republic portion) and explained the Department's evaluation criteria. PLD attendees were receptive and grateful for the information. Emboffs will arrange further discussions with the PLD transition team to explain TIP and emphasize the importance of the GODR's role in combating TIP, arresting those involved and ensuring that the accused are prosecuted.

Comment

19. (SBU) The timing could not have been better. The June 14 release of the 2003 TIP report gave the Embassy the opportunity to acknowledge the anti-TIP efforts of the current administration while stressing that considerable work remains to be done - especially in enforcement of the 2003 anti-TIP law. The press play on the release of the TIP report and on the Vasquez visa revocation put the issue in the minds of the policymakers and soon-to-be officials of the administration that will take office August 16. We used the transition conference to lay out to them the principles of the USG approach to TIP and to explain the need -- moral, humanitarian and bilateral -- to put anti-TIP efforts at the top of the agenda. They appeared receptive to our call to enforce the anti-TIP law and to arrest and to prosecute those involved with TIP and alien smuggling.

110. (U) Drafted by Angela Kerwin.

111. (U) This report and others are available on our SIPRNET site at <http://www.state/sgov/p/wha/santodomingo/> along with extensive other material.
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